STOP ONE Jacob Riis & How the Other Half Lives

Jacob Riis was born in Denmark. His father was a schoolteacher and he was one of 15 children. Riis immigrated to America at age twenty. He moved through Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York, taking odd jobs as a laborer and salesman, before landing a job with a New York City newspaper in 1873. Riis's work for the newspaper brought him to the city's Lower East Side, where he witnessed the grim living conditions first-hand. Riis found that in some tenements, the infant death rate was 1 in 10. By the late 1880s Riis had begun photographing the interiors and exteriors of the city's slums with a flash lamp. Riis used the images in his future publications. They contributed to the popularity of his book, *How the Other Half Lives*. The book's success made Riis famous. Future president Theodore Roosevelt responded to Riis's work by stating, "I have read your book, and I have come to help." *How the Other Half Lives* prompted the first significant New York legislation to curb tenement housing problems. It also became an important predecessor to the muckraking journalism that took shape in the United States during the Progressive Era.

"When nothing seems to help, I go and look at a stonecutter hammering away at his rock, perhaps a hundred times without as much as a crack showing in it. Yet at the hundred and first blow it will split in two, and I know it was not that last blow that did it, but all that had gone before."

— Jacob A. Riis

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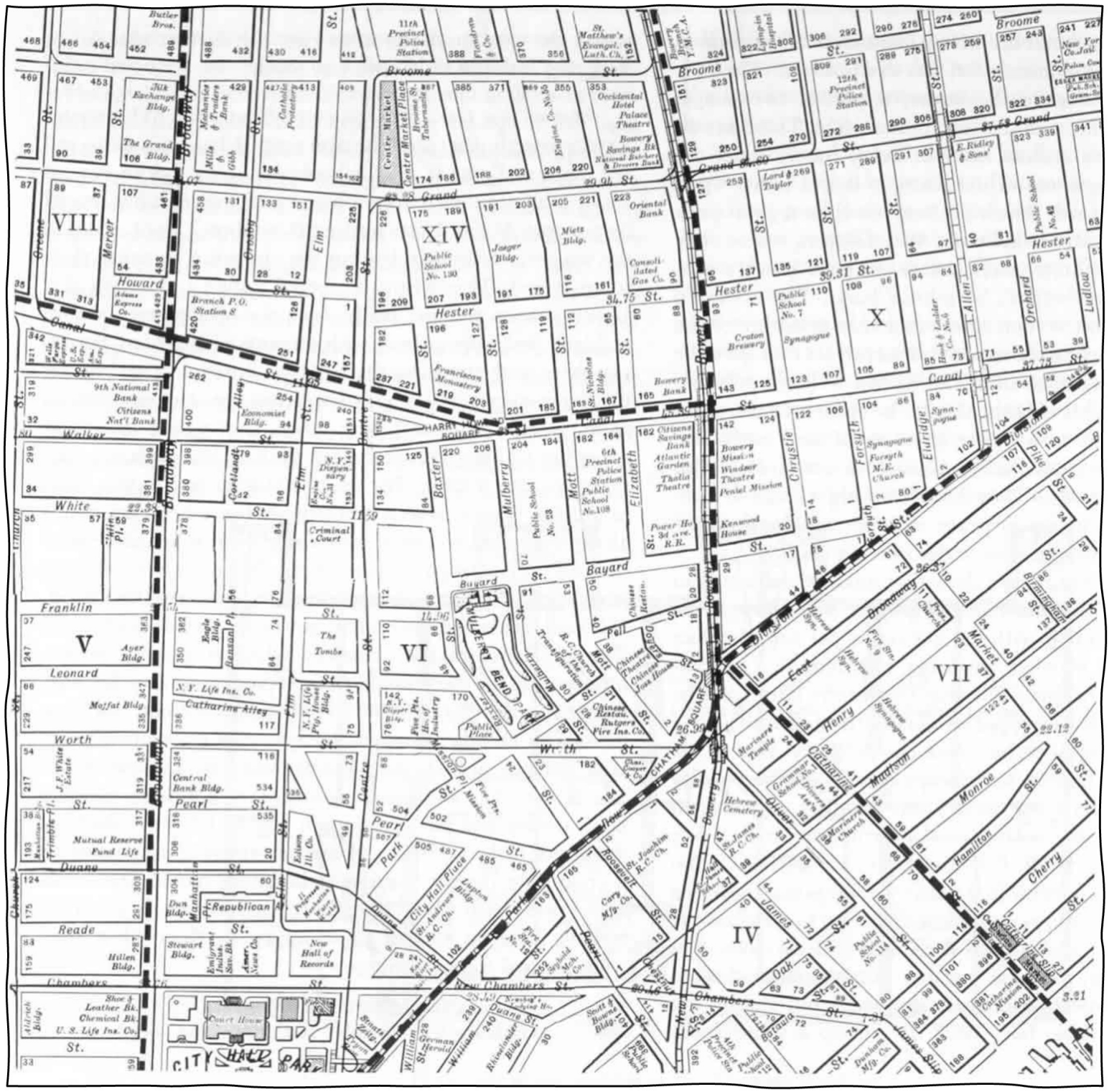
STOP TWO Reviewing the neighborhoods Riis surveyed



An 1899 map of lower Manhattan. The map details Mulberry Bend Park, Chinatown, Five Points, Jewish neighborhoods on Bayard and Baxter Streets, and the adjacent wards.

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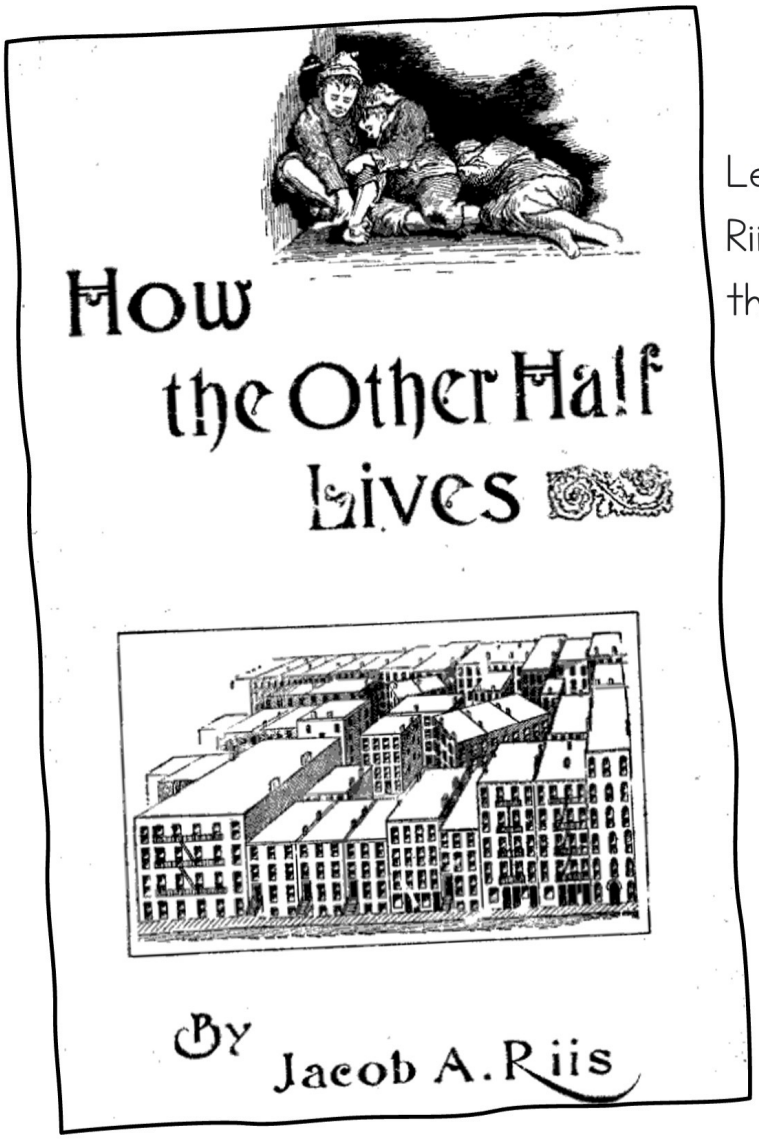
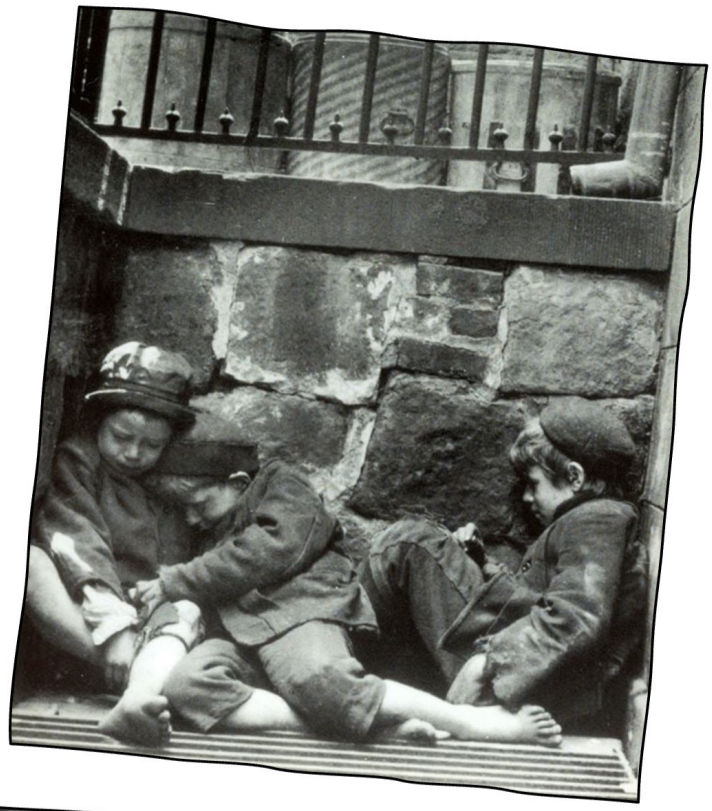
STOP THREE The book's cover



Left: the original cover of Riis's 1890 edition of How the Other Half Lives.



Above: one Riis's photographs.

Left: New York City tenements, 1890.

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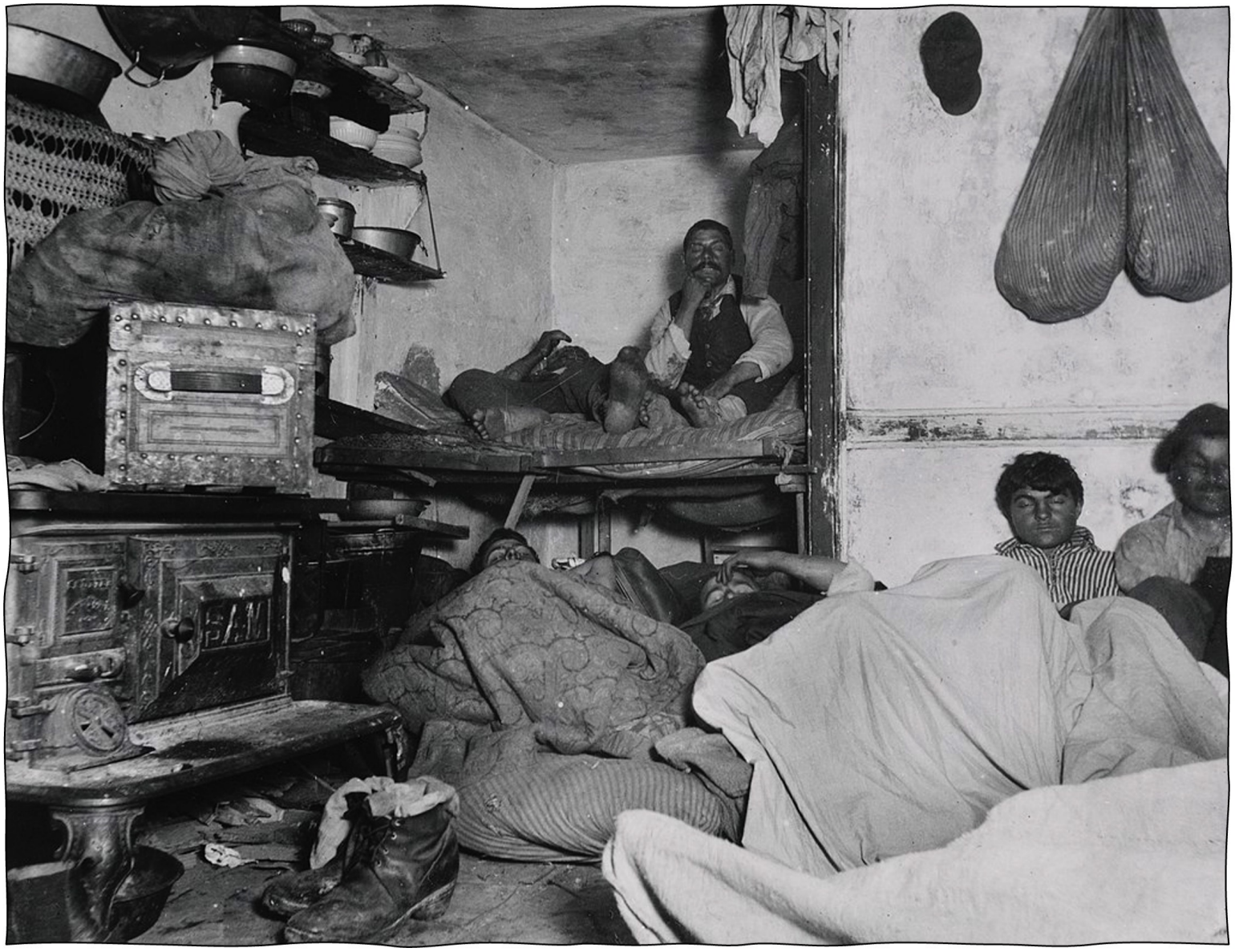
STOP FOUR

The Bayard Street Tenement: Five Cents a Spot



Riis surprised the inhabitants of this dark and crowded room when he captured this photograph. The price for renting a. bed in the room was 5 cents... 2 cents below the minimum price allowed by law. Even sometimes with controversial methods, Riis's photographic and journalistic work helped to create legislation that improved sanitary conditions for the poor.

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STOP FIVE
Jersey Street

Riis captured this photograph of an Italian family who lived in this one-room, windowless home on Jersey Street, a few blocks from Riis's Mulberry Street office. Jersey Street was crammed with the back-to-back tenements.

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STOP SIX
Bandits' Roost

Bandits' Roost was an alley on New York's Lower East Side where Italian immigrants paid excessive rent to live in rear tenements. These were ramshackle structures that were added onto old houses. Riis took this photograph of young "tough guys" who looked at the camera. This region of "Mulberry Bend" was notorious for gang and criminal activity.

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STOP SEVEN

The Children of the Poor

Riis visited many of the city's riverside dumping grounds to investigate if public health laws were being enforced. One law required that old rags be washed before they are resold. Another law forbid pickers from living in the dumping grounds. Riis learned that neither of the laws were being enforced.

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STOP EIGHT
Homeless Shelters

Riis also photographed the police lodging houses. These served as homeless shelters. This image was captured at the lodge on Eldridge Street. When a sick man asked to stay for the night, he was placed in an empty room and laid down on the bare plank floor. Officials soon learned the man had typhus.

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STOP NINE
Examining Other Photographs

PHOTO 1

PHOTO 2

PHOTO 3

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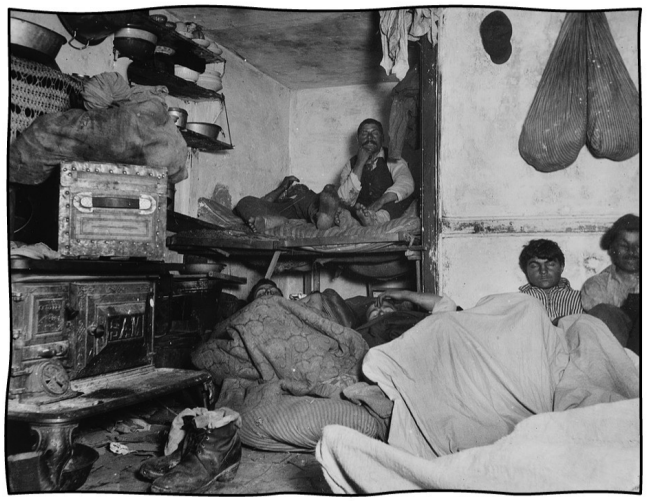
STOP TEN Matching Riis's Photographs to his Words

PHOTO 1

PHOTO 2

PHOTO 3

PHOTO 4



QUOTE A

"I found boys who ought to have been at school, picking bones and sorting rags. They said that they slept there, and as the men did, why should they not? It was their home. They were children of the dump, literally."

QUOTE B

"It was a piece of good luck that it was this [station] the typhus lodger found his way, or there is no telling where the trail of contagion he would have started might have ended."

QUOTE C

"You can see how they wrap [their babies] around and around until you can almost stand them on either end and they won't bend, so tightly are they bound."

QUOTE D

"In a room not thirteen feet either way slept twelve men and women, two or three in bunks set in a sort of alcove, the rest on the floor. A kerosene lamp burned dimly in the fearful atmosphere, probably to guide other and later arrivals to their beds, for it was only just past midnight... in the semi-darkness, three recumbent figures could be made out. The apartment was one of three in two adjoining buildings we had found, within half an hour, similarly crowded."

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STOP II
Analyzing Quotations

QUOTATION 1

"Not that all the tenements above Fourteenth Street are good, or even better than those we have seen. There is Hell's Kitchen and Murderers' Row in the region of West-side slaughter-houses and three-cent whiskey."

-Riis wrote in his 1889 article "How the Other Half Lives." The article was featured in Scribner's Magazine.

QUOTATION 2

"The Rivington Street was a small dump. That at the foot of East Seventeenth Street is next in order. The headquarters and stables of the Street Cleaning Department are there. That is also the only place where anything like an attempt is made to obey orders in the matter of washing [rags scavenged by rag-pickers]. . . . They come out as dirty as they went in. . . . [An] old man sits on an old box, keeping a lookout for the rats that threaten . . . . [A boy,] is 21, though he looks scarce 15. The dump has stunted him, physically as well as mentally."

-Riis is quoted in the article, "Extra: Real Wharf Rats," published in The Evening Sun in March of 1892.

QUOTATION 3

"I was a writer and a newspaper man, and I only yelled about the conditions which I saw. My share in the work of the slums has been that. I have not had a ten-thousandth part in the fight, but I have been in it."

-Riis was later quoted stating in an article featured in the San Jose Mercury in March of 1911.

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